

DANCING TO THE MUSIC

INTRODUCTION

When Gillian Lynne was a young girl she ran into problems at school. The educators at the school called her mother in to discuss her issues on more than one occasion. They told her mother there was something wrong with Gillian. She couldn't focus, she couldn't stay on task, she constantly was moving and disrupted the class. In today's world they would have said she had ADHD, but that particular problem wasn't available back in the 1930's. Out of desperation Gillian's mom took her to see a doctor who was a well known specialist. For 20 minutes he listened as Gillian's mom described her problems. He asked questions as he observed Gillian. Finally he went and sat next to Gillian. He said, "I need to talk to your mother, so we're going to leave the room for just a few minutes. You just sit here and we'll be back shortly." Then he turned on the radio to a station that was playing music and took her mother outside the room. He said, "I want you to just watch your daughter for a few moments." Very quickly Gillian got up and began dancing to the music. They watched for a time then the doctor said to the mom, "There's nothing wrong with your daughter. She isn't sick, she's a dancer. She thinks while she's moving." On the doctor's recommendation the mom took her out of school and put her in a dance school. Gillian immediately began to blossom. She was happy and successful in the school. She went on to dance with the Royal Ballet in London, eventually started her own successful dance school, choreographed Broadway productions including *Cats* and *Phantom of the Opera*, and became a multi-millionaire.

Gillian needed to find and be appreciated for who she was, not try to fit in someone else's mold. That's true of every human being. It is also true of churches. Churches commonly make the mistake of trying to fit into some other church's mold. What they need to do is find out who they are and be that to the best of their ability. That is as true of the Anchor as it is of any other church. So from time to time it is important to us to think about who we are so that we can dance to the music God has for us. I want to spend some time thinking about that today.

WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO DO?

Let's start with what we are not trying to do. We are not trying to be a social club designed to meet our own needs. We are not here to simply have some friends and be comfortable. There's nothing wrong with having friends at church. In fact,

there's everything right about church being a place where we belong, where we have good friendships. However, that's not all the church should be. Paul refers to Epaphroditus, one of his colleagues, as a "fellow soldier" in Philippians 2:25 and in 2 Timothy 2:3 tells Timothy to "endure hardship like a good soldier of Christ Jesus." That suggests that the church has some similarity to an army. Soldiers don't enlist in the army to be part of a nice social group. They are part of whatever unit they are assigned to, regardless of how compatible they are and they band together for a common purpose, a purpose that involves self-sacrifice.

There's a curious thing about that. Many years ago I had a friend who had been in the army and served in combat in Vietnam. He said that he had developed closer ties to the other men in his unit in Nam than he ever had with anyone else in his life. When he came home he missed those bonds of friendship and longed to have that again. That was one of the factors that led him to Christ. He encountered Christians who were the only people he knew who had relationships with each other that came close.

The military doesn't try to create groups of people who have a lot in common and work hard to help them develop friendships. They pull together disparate people, seek to break down their selfishness and build loyalty to the mission and the unit, and teach them to depend on each other and sacrifice to accomplish the mission. Under the pressure of combat deep bonds form. That's what the church is supposed to be like. We are committed to a mission, the mission of serving our Lord. Under the pressure of the combat of the spiritual battle as we depend on each other strong bonds are forged. But they are not bonds of convenience and comfort. They are bonds formed through the heat and pressure of battle, the battle to walk with our God and serve him in a hostile world.

That means we don't just try to form a group based on common interest, but on common cause. That passion for the common cause overcomes the differences we might have with each other. A classic story from years ago illustrates the point. Decades ago the late Ray Stedman became the first pastor of a dynamic church called Peninsula Bible Church up in Palo Alto. Ray had some radically different ideas about leadership and about the church. They did some innovative things in their church, and it grew large and strong. At one point during the tumultuous years of the "hippies" an amazing thing happened. This was a church in a well to do area that appealed to mostly up scale type people. One Sunday a young man who clearly was counter cultural, sort of unkempt and dirty, clearly a real "hippie," entered the worship service, walked down the center aisle during one of the songs and sat down on the floor right at the front of the auditorium. One of the ushers, an

older, proper gentleman in suit and tie, walked down the aisle toward the young man. For many there was tension in the air as they anticipated what might be an ugly confrontation as the usher tried to get the man to leave. Many were stunned at what happened. The usher didn't say a word to the young man. Instead he just sat down on the floor next to him.

What a powerful statement that man made that day. In a visible way he demonstrated the church is not about looking the same, being the same age, class, status or race. It is about accepting people regardless of differences and about focusing on the Lordship of Jesus.

We are also not trying to be a full service organization for the religious consumer. I don't mean this as a criticism of anyone. There are churches that, whether they intend it or not, could be characterized as doing just that. They provide a ministry for every taste and every interest so that no matter who you are or what your interest you will find a place at their church that suits your taste. That's not necessarily wrong. All I am saying is that is not our goal here. We need to recognize that our church will not appeal to everyone and that's all right.

Neither are we trying to build an impressive organization. Once again, I am not concerned about what anyone else is doing. The church is not intended to impress people with the same kind of power and efficiency we see in some of the organizations and corporations in the world around us. It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking we need to look good to the world on the basis of our size, resources, beautiful facilities, efficient programs and structures. That is not the focus we see in the Bible. There we see people tied together by the common Spirit of Jesus living in them. They share a common life. They are brothers and sisters. The family is a much closer analogy to the church than is a corporation. I fear that to the degree we get more corporate in our operations and interactions the farther we get from what Jesus intended us to be.

We are not trying to build our own little kingdom. Our goals are not about the Anchor Church, they are about the Kingdom of God. Other churches are not our competitors, they are our co-laborers for the kingdom, or brothers and sisters in Christ. We are not about building our little kingdom, but about building Christ's kingdom, and so we rejoice when his kingdom grows whether that be at the Anchor or elsewhere.

Enough about what we're not trying to do. What are we trying to do here? Philippians 3:20 says, "our citizenship is in heaven." As altruistic as this may

sound, we are trying to be a little colony of heaven here on earth. 1 Peter 2:11 addresses Christians as “aliens and strangers in the world.” Our true home is heaven. We understand how people who are from another country but live in this nation might seek to keep their home culture alive. They speak their native language in their home, eat their native foods, observe their native traditions. Years ago when Laurie and I were trying to find a house to buy we visited a lot of houses that were for sale. In one an extended family clearly from another country lived there. They didn’t speak much English. As we toured the house they were cooking some of their native food. I couldn’t get out of the house fast enough. It reeked! The odor made my stomach turn over because it was so powerful and gross. I couldn’t believe people would eat something that smelled that bad. I don’t know what it was but it was horrendous. Those people’s home is a little slice of their homeland, and evidently it had the smell of the homeland. In their home they are speaking their native language and eating their native food, being a little outpost of their home culture.

In effect, that is what we are to do. Our true home is the kingdom of God, the place where God rules, where his will is always done. The Anchor Church is to be a place where people experience the kingdom of God, where we endeavor always to do God’s will. People should sense that there is something different here, a different culture is at work that they don’t find at work, at school, in their neighborhoods, on their teams or in their clubs. If it is not a part of God’s kingdom, it should not exist here in our fellowship. If it is part of God’s kingdom, whatever it is, it should exist here.

One of the most important things we can do is to keep our eyes on the target. In the movie *The Patriot* there is a scene in which the central character, Benjamin Martin, along with two of his young sons must raid a British patrol in order to rescue another of his sons. As they prepare their guns he asks them to remember what he has taught them about shooting. They repeat “aim small, miss small.” That’s a shooters maxim. It means one must focus in on a small target. Don’t shoot at the large mass of a body but pick out a button on the chest and shoot at the button. For us as a church it is aim small, miss small. Aim at being a slice of the kingdom of God, a colony of heaven. We won’t hit the target exactly for we are imperfect people. But if we keep our focus sharp and small, our misses will be smaller.

Every human being, whether they are conscious of it or not, longs for the kingdom of God. It is an undying dream in the human soul. It is that place of real love, real peace and true joy that we have a thirst for even if we don’t realize it is the kingdom of God. You and I want it, along with everyone else in the world. All of

the various utopian dreams are really reflections of a longing for God's kingdom. Even communism is really about this longing. This church doesn't need to be powerful, impressive, glitzy, or full of high production values. What it needs to be is a taste of the kingdom of God. That's what we need, and it is what the world is longing for.

WHAT WILL THAT MEAN FOR US?

Again I will begin with what this plan does not mean. It does not mean a program or a method. I'm not down on programs. Any ministry will have some sort of program. A program is simply the practical working out of an approach to ministry, a way of trying to accomplish something. So I am not anti-program. However, I see something common in the church today that is of concern. It is that the church becomes primarily a purveyor of programs and with that is a belief that the key to ministry is having the right program or method.

When you read the Bible what do you see about programs or methods in the church? Almost nothing! We are told to pray, to read Scripture, to sing praises to God, love each other, walk in the Spirit, but that's about it. There is nothing in the Bible about Sunday School, youth programs, evangelism and outreach programs, the order of worship services, or any of the myriad of programs and methodologies you can find in churches today. If the program or the method was key to accomplishing what the church is to do, wouldn't you think God would have included it? I believe what Peter wrote in 2 Peter 1:3 is absolutely true, "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness."

In the Bible and in the Spirit of Christ in us we have everything we need for life, everything we need for godliness, thus everything we need to carry out the mission that he has given our church. In their book, *Spiritual Leadership* (p. 76), Henry and Richard Blackaby wrote, "a church program never changed a life. Only God does that." That's a powerful reminder of something that we very easily forget. Changing people's hearts requires a dramatic work of the Spirit of God that no human method or program can produce. We are not the purveyors of programs. We are to be the purveyors of life! Here is God's program for the church: it is God's Spirit using his word to transform people then employ them in the world.

God's "methodology" is to take widely varying, terribly flawed people, give them a new life in Jesus Christ and use them in his own unique way. We ought to expect that he will continue using people in their colorful variety, people with all kinds of

flaws. That way it will be his power and wisdom that get the credit, not the brilliance of people or their programs and methods.

Yes, but what does that mean? It means our “program” will be to have the Spirit of Christ and the Word of God rule. That should be evident in us corporately. As an outpost of heaven there should be a tangible difference between what happens in a group of people in the world around us and what happens in this group of people we call our church. As a group we should follow Jesus Christ, not just as Lord of the worldwide church, but as the Lord of this little church.

How do things usually work in the world? Great enterprises in the world typically start with a leader who has a vision. Many people think this is what the church requires as well. They quote Proverbs 29:18, “Where there is no vision the people perish.” The church, we are told, will die if the leader doesn’t have a vision and get the people to pursue that vision. However, the Blackabys wrote in *Spiritual Leadership*, “Leaders’ best thinking will not build the kingdom of God. Why? Because people do not naturally think the way God does.”

They are exactly right. In Matthew 16 there is an excellent example of this. After hearing the report that some people thought he was a prophet, some thought he was Elijah, and so on, Jesus asked his disciples who they thought he was. Peter piped up, “you are the Christ, the Son of God.” Jesus heartily commended him for correctly understanding who he was. Then he began to explain that he was going to eventually be killed. Peter took him aside to stop such talk. He thought this was a defeatist attitude. He had a vision for God’s plan, for what Jesus should be doing, and it had nothing to do with Messiah dying on a cross. Peter was a leader, and he was visionary, but he wasn’t thinking God’s thoughts. In verse 23 Jesus said to him, “get behind me, Satan.”

It is helpful if we recognize that the previous quote of Proverbs 29:18 was the old King James translation, one that we now know was not a good one. The New International Version translation of the Hebrew text is more accurate. It reads, “Where there is no *revelation* the people cast off restraint.” The Blackabys write (p. 69), “The world functions by vision. But God does not ask his followers to operate by vision. God’s people live by revelation.” The leader’s job is not to create a vision, but to help people listen to and follow the Spirit of Christ!

Our program is to follow the Spirit of Jesus wherever he leads us, believing that the Holy Spirit is real, active among us and leading us. That means that we will continually trust that what God supplies is enough. We will do that as a church.

Recently I had a conversation with a person who had a friend come to our church. This friend was confused by the fact that we don't take an offering. He said, "But how do you get the money you need to operate?" The member of our church said, "Well, we have that little box there and people can put what they wish to give in it." His friend said, "But most churches make a big deal out of giving. Don't you think you could get more money if you had an offering?" The Anchor member said, "Well, we believe God will provide what we need. We trust him and don't rely on ourselves to drum up giving." What we are doing there is corporately living as though our God is real, working in our midst and will provide what we need.

We look to the Spirit of Jesus continually to direct us to what actions we should take, what programs we should have, ministries we should have. But our vision is that this group of people would be different from the world around us. Jesus would be Lord, leading us. We will trust him to work and to provide. And because we follow him we will interact with each other in ways that are different from the world. The world around us is about power, image, competition. It is about winning and looking good. It is a hierarchy of money, influence, image, talent where there are always winners and losers.

I believe it was Donald Miller in *Blue Like Jazz* who wrote of a friend's dismay over a very high powered youth ministry at his church. This large ministry at one point had a competition between groups. One of the groups turned out to be the "nerd" group, the group of those who were kind of awkward, on the outside. At the big rally at the end they announced the winning group as the whole group was whipped up to a frenzy of excitement. When to the shock of all the group that won turned out to be the nerd group there was a nearly total shocked silence. No one cheered that result. He said it was one of the most devastating experiences he had in church. In that church the way they related was just like the rest of the world. The losers in the world were the losers in the church.

I also know of a megachurch that televises its services. It is a glitzy ministry with high production values. The dismaying thing is the ushers are instructed to make sure that younger, good-looking people are seated in the front of the audience where cameras panned to catch views of the audience. This is just not what the kingdom of God is to be like. Our "vision" is that this church would be a place where the world's value system is turned upside down. Here we are not to be about looking good, keeping up the image. We are not about competing with each other, besting each other. This is the place where there is to be true humility before Christ, where there is authenticity in our love for one another, where we don't try

to best each other, try to keep up with others, but we love each other and serve each other as we are.

That kind of encouragement, love and support is needed because the world is pretty good at grinding people down and beating them up. This is the place where they are to come and find a salve for their wounds. Here they are to encounter grace, God's astounding grace, pervading in our hearts, our lives and our interactions with one another.

There is another aspect to our "program" of following the Spirit of Christ. The program is about how we reach out to the world. How are we going to do that? The plan is to have God's people going out into the world to be salt and light, to be bright shining beacons of grace and hope in the world around us. That is our outreach plan, our method of impacting the world. We, all of us here, are it. There is no plan B. But this is a terrific plan.

If you watch television will see ads for weight loss plans of all sorts. You'll see weight watchers, nutrisystem, jenny craig, slimfast, special k diet and all kinds of pills. Which is going to actually work? There are some pretty clever ads for some of them, but that doesn't mean the plan will work. Recently I was talking to Shirley and Dennis Phelps and I observed that they both have lost a lot of weight. They look great! They told me they did it through the medifast program. From my encounter with them I am convinced that plan works. That is way more effective than all the advertising in the world.

The Phelps don't preach Medifast to people. They are just living its program and the results are undeniable. It is a powerful testimony. Churches tend to want to "advertise" the gospel of Jesus Christ. Obviously that can have some effect just like the advertising for weight loss programs does. But a changed life has way more power than any ad. It is when people in the world encounter followers of Jesus who have what they are looking for.

This doesn't mean we all have to go out into the world and prove that we are better than other people or more religious than they are. We just need to have what they are looking for. What is that? Real peace, hope, confidence in our God in a tumultuous and uncertain world, peace before God, peace in who we are to the point that we can be humble and honest even about our failings and shortcomings, that we have nothing to prove, that we have real joy and authentically love, forgive and bring grace into other people's lives.

Yesterday Laurie and I went to a funeral at El Camino cemetery for Lisa Loegering's mom. One thing was glaringly obvious. Around the time of that funeral there were 3 others going on there. That is literally a place people are dying to get into, and they're doing it a lot. After the funeral we visited the grave of our first son, Joel. As we stood there we were startled by a loud bang we heard that was some distance away. Then there was another and another. It was a 21 gun salute, obviously part of a final farewell for a former military person. Then we heard the haunting sound of a lone bugle playing *Taps*.

That plaintive tune drifting on the breeze powerfully drives home the truth of life. We all stand helpless before the grave. It is the ultimate reality for all of us. People occupy themselves with all manner of diversion to avoid confronting that ominous certainty. Standing in a cemetery surrounded by graves, hearing that lonely song being played you cannot get away from it. People need hope in the face of such a terror. No matter what they say or do, they are desperate for it. What a powerful thing it is to live with hope in Christ. We have hope before the grave. Everyone needs that hope. Nothing in life is as important. As we live with the peace and joy of that hope it will impact other people. Listen to the words of one of the verses of *Taps*, "Day is done, gone the sun. From the lake, from the hill, from the sky, all is well, safely rest, God is nigh." God is with us, and that changes everything. That's what people need. We just need to go into the world and let them see us experiencing that all is well, we safely rest because God is nigh.

We can have such an impact if we just live the life God has given us. In his book, *Living Life On Purpose*, Greg Anderson tells the story of one of his friends. This friend was at a low ebb. He was struggling in his career and his marriage had fallen apart, his wife had left him. He was depressed, had lost faith in himself, in other people and in God. He had no joy at all in his life. One rainy morning he went to a neighborhood restaurant to have breakfast. It was a typical scene. There were people in the restaurant, all minding their own business and ignoring each other. A mom and her little girl were sitting in one booth. The waitress brought their food and the little girl said, "Momma, why don't we say our prayers here like we do at home?" The waitress, who had started moving away, turned back and said, "Sure, honey, we pray here. Why don't you say a prayer for us?" Then she said to the other people in the restaurant, "Bow your heads." Surprisingly, they all did. The little girl bowed her head and said, "God is great, God is good, and we thank him for our food. Amen." Everyone went back to their meals, but the whole mood had changed. People started talking to each other. There was a new, lighter atmosphere, a sense of community. The waitress said, "We should do that every morning." Anderson's friend said his mood changed as well. He started to thank God for what

he had instead of majoring in all that he didn't have. In that moment, he said, he began to choose happiness. That little girl didn't set out to preach to anyone or to change anyone. She just lived out her faith and that was all that was needed to make a difference.

WHAT MUST WE DO?

There is no program for this. It requires God working in the hearts and lives of people in this church, transforming them. Romans 8:29 says of those who have been called according to his purpose, in other words, those who are his children through Christ, "Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son." That's God's program. Using his Word, his Spirit at work in us, other people, circumstances both good and bad, to make us like Jesus. Therefore here is what we all must do:

Have Jesus Be Lord

What this will mean for each of us is that we must have Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives. We must choose to live for his kingdom, to seek it first, rather than to live for our own kingdom. That means what we must care about most of all is that Jesus rules in our lives, our words, our actions, our priorities, our interactions with others, our values, and everything else in our lives.

Last summer Laurie and I met a co-worker of Scott Strom's and Kevin Thompson's. This man is a follower of Christ whose wife suffered a brain aneurysm that should have killed her. She survived but her brain was damaged. She can function, but she is not the same person this man used to be married to. She has suffered memory loss and has almost no short term memory. Her personality has changed and she cannot relate to her husband as she once did. She struggles just to get through her days. Her husband continues to love her and serve her even though he will now never have the marriage he once did. He is living each day letting Jesus be the Lord of his life by staying faithful to his marriage vows and loving his wife.

But we also need to let Jesus be Lord in the little moments in life. That is important to recognize because life is made mostly of little moments. For instance, I recently fought the internal battle of the toilet paper roll. You know how you come into the restroom and discover that the last person has used all the tissue on the roll and all that's there is that little cardboard tube? Before you can do anything else you have to find another roll of tissue, take that little dowel out, put the new roll on the dowel, stick the dowel back between the braces, then pull off the first sheet of the tissue because it is glued down, all before you can do any of your business. That's

just a part of personal hygiene, but there's always that question of why didn't the last person to use the facility, the person who used up the last of the toilet paper, take the time to considerately put a new roll on the holder? Recently I had an experience where not only was there no toilet paper on the holder, but there was no empty tube, and there was no dowel. There were just the two braces sticking out from the wall. And there were no empty toilet paper rolls in the room. I had to go find an empty roll in another bathroom before I could do anything. After that I did my business and then went searching for the missing dowel.

It would be easy to be impatient or annoyed with the person who left that situation. But Jesus wants to be Lord of even that kind of circumstance. We can have great impact on those around us through our little irritations, through the words we speak, the tone of voice we use, even our expressions. We can do damage or we can bless them. Our Lord wants us to bless them, so letting Jesus be Lord in that situation meant I needed to treat that person with kindness and gentleness. I would seek to serve her. My point is that living for the kingdom of God comes into play every day.

Let Grace Dominate

We must let God's grace be the dominant force in our lives. His grace informs how we think about and relate to God. It humbles us before him, but also frees us. We are now free to draw near to him, to enjoy him, because he loves us and gives his grace at all times in everything, whether we are succeeding or failing.

If you were here last week you had the privilege of hearing Micah and Alycia Vandover. What a joy they are! They are so inspiring. Their lives and their stories of how God uses them to bring others to Jesus are so exciting. But there is one potential downside that goes with that. We were talking about what they said at lunch and Toby said, "I feel like a bad Christian." All of us felt the same way. I am just not like them and I wish I were. In other words, it is easy for us to set them as the standard and see how far we fall short. Guilt results. Here's the great news: God does not love us and accept us into his forever kingdom because we measure up and can perform. He accepts us and loves us because Jesus performed for us and no other reason!

His grace informs our identity. We are secure in who we are because it is founded in God's grace, not in our ability to perform or measure up to some standard. This gives us enormous peace. It also should enable us to extend that same grace to others who do not measure up to our standards, who fail us or even hurt us. God's

grace should be the dominant factor that shapes all of our relationships here in the kingdom of God.

Follow The Spirit

We must live by the Spirit continually. That means trusting in God's grace totally and in his provision for us. It also means following his lead. That means believing that he is real, that he is working in our hearts and in our world. It means looking to see where he is leading us, what he wants us to do and then doing it, and doing it on a continuing basis. It is like letting him be our spiritual GPS. I once rode with a friend who had a GPS system in his car as we went to a meeting in an unfamiliar place. He didn't worry about where he was going, how to get there. He just did what the system told him. I asked him what happens if he rebelled. He showed me. The system didn't say "Hey, Nimrod, you missed the turn. What's the matter with you? Did you get your drivers license out of a Wheaties box or something. Or are you deaf? Fix the problem now before you make it any worse." It calmly told him where to turn next and brought him back on path. Let's follow the Spirit of Christ, knowing he will tell us where and how to turn, using his Word especially. If we err he won't call us names, he'll just bring us back to the right path.